

Date of Hearing: July 5, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
Laura Friedman, Chair  
SB 287 (Grove) – As Amended March 5, 2021

**SENATE VOTE:** 39-0

**SUBJECT:** Vehicles: trailers

**SUMMARY:** Authorizes drivers with a Class C driver's license (DL) with a trailer endorsement to tow a trailer between 10,000 and 15,000 pounds gross vehicle weight (GVW) using a gooseneck trailer hitch if the towing is not for compensation or commercial purposes and the vehicle used to tow the vehicle is a two axle-vehicle with a combined GVW rating (GVWR) of less than 26,000 pounds. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Authorizes a driver with a Class C driver's license to drive the above described trailer if they receive an endorsement from the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) by taking a specialized written examination relating to towing safety.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Authorizes a driver with a Class C DL to drive a trailer not exceeding a GVWR of 10,000 pounds if the total GVWR of the vehicle and the trailer have a combined GVWR under 26,000 pounds.
- 2) Authorizes a driver with a Class C DL to tow a recreational trailer with a fifth wheel hitch and a GVWR between 10,000 and 15,000 pounds if they have an endorsement from DMV showing their understanding of the law.
- 3) Requires a Class A Commercial Driver's License (CDL) for towing a trailer over 10,000 pounds if the trailer hitch is not a fifth wheel hitch or over 15,000 pounds if it is a recreational trailer with a fifth wheel hitch.
- 4) Requires an individual, in order to obtain a CDL, to successfully complete both a written and driving test that comply with the minimum federal standards to operate a commercial motor vehicle.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown.

**COMMENTS:** In California, a CDL is required to operate a vehicle that has a GVWR of 26,001 pounds or more; a single vehicle with a GVWR less than 26,000 pounds which is designed, used, or maintained to transport more than 10 passengers; a vehicle towing any vehicle with a GVWR of 10,001 pounds or more (or 15,001 pounds if it's a recreational trailer with a fifth wheel hitch) ; any vehicle that tows more than 1 vehicle or a trailer bus, and any vehicle which requires hazardous material placards or transports hazardous waste.

Unlike the traditional Class C DL, a Class A CDL requires proof of legal residency, requires the driver to be at least 18, requires additional medical certifications, requires passage of a driving

skills test, and includes additional questions for examination. A Class C DL is necessary before someone can get a CDL.

*What's in a hitch?* Under existing law, a driver with a noncommercial Class C DL can drive a recreational trailer with a GVRW up to 15,000 pounds if it uses a fifth wheel hitch, so long as they have an endorsement from DMV to drive a trailer over 10,000 pounds. This bill extends that right to vehicles using a gooseneck hitch.

According to CURT, a brand that makes both gooseneck and fifth wheel trailer hitches, there are many similarities between a fifth wheel and gooseneck trailer hitch. Both hitches connect to the truck bed and have the ability to tow up to 30,000 pounds. The major difference between the two is a gooseneck hitch tends to be less invasive, is less expensive, and tends to be used more for commercial towing and agricultural uses. Fifth wheel hitches have enhanced stability, and offer smoother, quieter, more stable towing, which is why they tend to be used more for recreational uses and less skilled drivers.

*According to the Author,* "SB 278 will level the playing field and give peace of mind to California's horse enthusiasts and recreationalists by allowing any recreational trailer between 10,001 and 15,000 pounds GVWR to be towed using a class C license with a recreational trailer endorsement. Along with specialized safety testing, which is already being implemented, this classification will ensure that families are able to safely operate their recreational trailers without fear of penalty or being impounded."

While most recreational trailers use a fifth wheel hitch, some manufacturers have been releasing recreational trailers that also can carry horses using a gooseneck hitch. It is possible these companies opted to use a gooseneck hitch over a fifth wheel trailer hitch because horse trailers without living quarters typically have the minimally invasive and less expensive gooseneck hitch. Trailers that can carry 4 or more horses also have a GVWR of four or more horses. However, if a driver were to use a recreational trailer with a gooseneck hitch instead of a fifth wheel hitch, they could run afoul of state law if they do not have a CDL and the trailer had a GVWR of more than 10,000 pounds.

The California Farm Bureau, writing in support of this bill, argues "Senate Bill 287 corrects this unnecessary and contradictory provision in California law by providing the state's equine enthusiasts the same licensing flexibility granted to other operators with recreational vehicle endorsements."

The California Highway Patrol has not raised any safety concerns with this bill.

*Previous Legislation:* SB 415 (Grove, 2019), would have increased the weight of trailers that a person with a class C license could tow. This bill failed passage in the Senate Transportation Committee.

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

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**Opposition**

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